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"Centaur and Lady #1," o/c, 72"x88", 1982

Paul Georges by Carter Ratcliff

The Artist As Curator by Stephen Grillo
About Sentimentality by Robert Godfrey
Letter To A Young Artist by Barbara Rose

Editorial

Publishing our fourth Journal is particularly satisfying. This past September the Museum sponsored its biggest show to date, "Bodies and Souls," and helped launch the 1983-4 New York exhibition season; the cover and accompanying monograph by Carter Ratcliff features Paul Georges—the painter whose idea(s) and energy helped launch the ACM. Paul's work has been inspiring to many painters so we were very pleased when Carter accepted our invitation to help us focus on his impressive oeuvre, and delighted with Carter's sensitive and erudite ability to deal with its vast scope. A concentration on monographic studies remains the focus of the journal. We are committed to highlight artists and ideas that, although they may not be completely overlooked, could use a closer look, a benefit to both them and to us.

At a time when as Barbara Rose says in her insightful and informative "Letter to a Young Artist," published in Vanity Fair this past July, "Natural selection plays a smaller and smaller part in the making of artists' careers," the ACM is more relevant than ever, and our article on artists/curators deals with an idea that is the basis of the museum—the concept of artists controlling the destiny of their work. The interview with Jim Wilson, artist/curator of "Bodies and Souls," is augmented by comments on the subject from other artist/curators Bob Godfrey, Tomar Levine, and Joe Giordano. The subject is not without controversy, and the very notion of artists curating shows sends shivering, nightmarish visions of vanity-gallery-aesthetics and coterie-controlled exhibits through the sleepless nights of the so-called professional curators. But the artists heard from here demonstrate a complete awareness of this controversy and also show that they honestly struggled to function openly and effectively while adhering to strict aesthetic criteria.

Thus we celebrate a man's inspiring work, indulge in an examination of our own raison d'etre, and, finally, delight in the wonders of speculative writing. In his article on Sentimentalism, Robert Godfrey addresses himself to what is one of the two most nagging questions for painters when they ponder the messages communicated by their work—having their work perceived as illustration and/or as sentimental. Self-consciously grappling with these questions has caused modern artists to deny feeling in their work and to force a "dissociation of sensibility," to use T.S. Elliot's famous phrase. In an article devoid of sentimenal prose yet calling for a return to feeling, Mr. Godfrey evinces a new wholistic sensibility.

Director's View

By the time you are reading this our Bodies and Souls exhibition of 156 figurative painting in eleven galleries on Fifty-seventh street in New York City will unfortunately be over. I say unfortunately, because it is without doubt the most ambitious and successful event we have ever produced, and in my view, easily the type of exhibit which could bear repeated viewings over a period of a month. Alas we do not yet have the resources for this type of thing, but with everyone's help we surely will one day.

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ACM JOURNAL

Stephen Grillo — Editor
Charles Leopardo — Art Director

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Paul Georges

by Carter Ratcliff

I first saw a painting by Paul Georges at the Whitney Museum of American Art. The occasion was the Whitney Annual of 1971 and the canvas was "The Return of the Muse." This is an immense painting, but that didn't impress me as much as an almost imperceptible quality of its surface—an aspect of Georges' brushwork that is hard to see and just about impossible to describe. The best I can do is to say that Georges seemed to put paint on the canvas without irony—consciously, deliberately, all of that, but without the air of doubleness, of intentions held in reserve, that characterizes so much of the art of our time. In fact, it could be argued that modernism in art is a matter of finding the visual means to convey an ironic attitude. Georges' allegory of inspiration seemed to me to be complex, full of difficulty, but not ironic. What was "said" was meant, however elusive the message might finally turn out to be, and I felt that his sincerity of visual "utterance" could be felt in the very textures of the painting. Georges was not a "silent" painter on the Jasper Johns model, which had come to be so widely admired in those seasons.

Now, I hasten to admit that there is no easy way to certify one painter's touch as ironic and another's as straightforward. Perhaps, though, there will not be a great deal of disagreement if I claim that, ever since the early days of Cubism (possibly before), artists have as often conveyed their intentions by distortion and omission as by more direct means. Modernism is, among other things, a dedication to ellipsis; at one extreme, elliptical form produces what we call abstract painting; yet figurative imagery can partake of this extreme, as well. (Think, for example, of Roy Lichtenstein's terseness.) So, to put my remarks on Georges' absence of irony in another way, I'll suggest that his images give no sign of yearning for the state of modernist abstraction. My implication of course, is that most figurative art of the last decade—of the last century or so, for that matter—evidences precisely that yearning. Figure painters in our times feel the need to justify themselves in the face of abstraction's refusal to present any readily recognizable faces, and of course these justifications usually take

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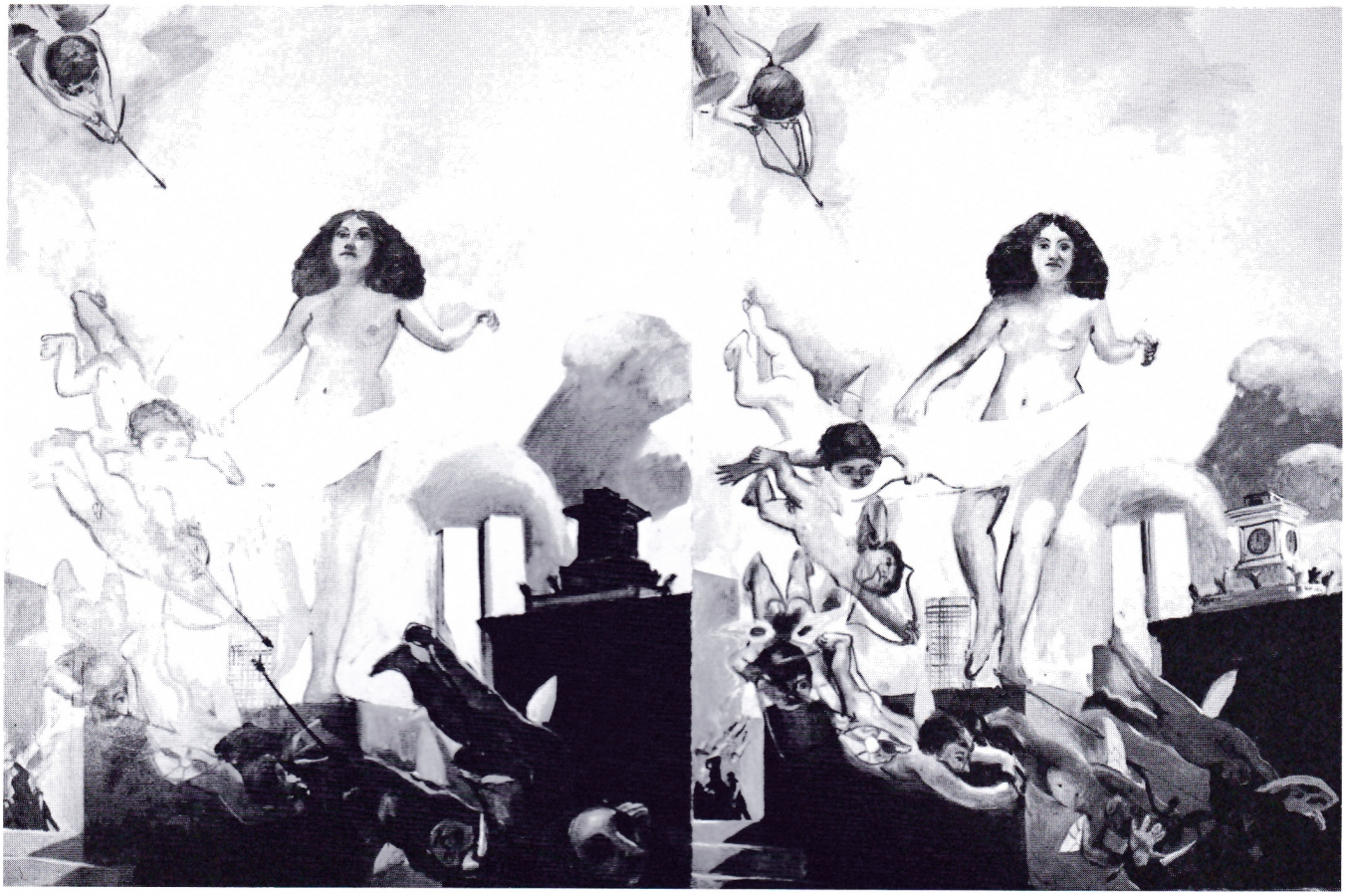
"The Gods Meet The Satellite," o/c, 11'3"x20', 1978-81

"Centaur and Lady #2," o/c, 90"x82", 1982

"Fantasy About Freedom #2," o/c, 8'8"x9'6",

"Return of the Muse," o/c, 10'x20',



"The Muse Fights Back," o/c, 108"x160", 1980-1983

the form of an imitation of abstraction's ironies and ellipses. I'm not saying this is good or bad. I don't think any of us, whatever our affinities and allegiances, is in the position to make such judgments. What I'm saying is that Paul Georges' figurative images are not covered by this rule. They show no inclination to offer a defense at the tribunal of modernist history.

Georges paints with un-modernist directness, yet this doesn't require him to avoid the history of recent painting. His five-figure "Fantasy" of a few seasons back is as clear a reminiscence of Matisse's 1910 "Dance" as I've ever seen. There are even, as Margorie Welish has suggested, hints of Picassoid harshness in some of this "Fantasy's" faces. Yet Georges is not quoting here, not making an intricate point by means of a judiciously ordered set of references to earlier work. It seems, rather, that Georges sees earlier painting much as he sees everything else—as potentially paintable. In some important way, the human form is always the same for him, whether it appears in art or in life. As a result, differences between modernist and premodernist figures are simply not alive for Georges. All his capacity for nuance is caught up in the task of conveying the intensity of his response to the presence, the image, of others. Thus he may paint from the model in one instance, from a memory of Matisse in another and, in yet another, from his intuitive grasp of Baroque dramatics. In all cases, the figure ends up in a familiar state of vividness and muscularity.

By refusing to be defined by the limits of modernist history, Georges has put himself in a position to come as close as anyone can to painting itself.

To an artist with no use for irony, all periods of art are just as available as life's latest instant, no more so and no less. A consequence of this wide-ranging freedom is a close fit between signs of direct painterly observation and the devices of the traditional genres. Here I'm trying to get at Georges' tendency to ignore, perhaps even trample on occasion, the borders between familiar categories of style, content, history and so on. Thus he mixes the most straightforward kind of realism with history painting and allegory. His "Venus and Mars" of 1978-82 presents these two Olympian personages in as dignified a manner as Alberti could have hoped when he set forth his definition of history painting. The figures are elevated in nature (they are gods, after all), stately in form and noble in gesture. Venus in her bath, no less than war-bound Mars, looms large against the characteristically vast sky of this canvas. Yet no one would see the work as an exercise in the revival of history painting. Georges breaks too many of the genre's rules—rather, he simply sets them aside in pursuit of meanings too expansive for any traditional genre of painting, on one hand, or modernism's ironic dismissal of tradition, on the other. Venus is as nude as she has been since the Renaissance, yet Mars wears twentieth-century infantryman's garb. His pose hides his face, a familiar device for directing the attention to her expression, which is not at all predictable. There is something decidedly un-Olympian about this Venus, despite her descent from Baroque precedents. She looks bemused as she tries to guide Mars off the war path, toward love, and her bemusement has the quality of a re-

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"The Big Apple," o/c, 82"x72", 1983

"Still Life," o/c, 60"x40", 1981

cently observed trait. Only in our time, I'm tempted to think, are there faces as self-consciously elegaic as hers. One expects this kind of acuity only from the most alert of our realists, in whose ranks I think we should put Georges—and yet he doesn't really fit there. His "Venus and Mars" may not, strictly speaking, be a history painting, yet it is not clearly anything else. By refusing to be defined by the limits of modernist history, Georges has put himself in a position to come as close as anyone can to painting itself.

Georges' Venus is no ordinary goddess because, in so many immediately recognizable ways, she is an admirably ordinary woman. She is colossal but not inaccessible. Likewise, the monumental forms of Georges' nudes, male as well as female, tend to sport the tanmarks that bathing suits leave. He engages the august tradition of the nude with bodies that are, quite simply, naked, undressed, exposed—and not always completely at ease about it. Thus, once again, a realist's impulses join with those of a pre-modern traditionalist, with results that cannot be accounted for with the help of either label. "The Gods Meet the Satellites" is a gargantuan, multi-paneled painting of gods and goddesses at sport in the empyrean. Here Georges makes his most direct assault on those redoubts of ambition and daring occupied by the Baroque. The painting denies that our rational view of the heavens is sufficient, even now, in these days of carefully-documented space flight. Georges has said that he painted this canvas in response to an astronaut's comment that he hadn't seen any angels in the course of his extraterrestrial travels. Each of these heroic figures owes the distinctness of his or her personality to Georges' direct, even blunt brand of realism, yet clearly no realist's disinclination to see angels (whether NASA's or Courbet's) was at work. Thus tradition in Georges' art takes on an allegorical overtone. Clearly the "heavenly bodies" of "The Gods Meet the Satellites," like the artist's "Venus and Mars," are susceptible to allegorical interpretation—as is the plainest, least mysterious still life. But I mean something more here. I mean that the ease with which Georges moves across boundaries, the apparent insouciance with which he leaps from category to category, has taken on, over the years, an additional weight of meaning. The very nature of his art, the wide reach of his style, begins to look like an allegory of the freedom a painter is able to claim if only the will to do so is present. Georges' freedom is nowhere clearer than in his recent landscapes, which are also studies of the nude figure, and still lifes as well. These canvases belong to all three genres and to none of them. They are inventions of a new genre and a series of denials that genres and their traditions have any pertinence to contemporary painting. Some of them represent Georges' "Baroque sky," the consequence of his dramatically low horizon line, in a world of preternaturally green foliage. Others push the horizon toward the top of the canvas and make a sky of the foliage itself. In all of these paintings, Georges' light shines on form and color—or shines *through* them—with his familiar directness. His art doesn't so much display an absence of irony as a positive, perhaps even heroic dedication to its opposite, which is sincerity.

The very nature of his art, the wide reach of his style, begins to look like an allegory of the freedom a painter is able to claim if only the will to do so is present.

"The Muse Comes To Give Consultation," o/c, 6'x10', 1983

"The Roses and Centaur," o/c, 68"x108" 1982-83